

P 311148Z JUL 97
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1928
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LOME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 004941

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SUBJECT: A CLOSE LOOK AT GHANA'S PRESIDENT RAWLINGS

REF: ACCRA 01142

CLASSIFIED BY EDWARD BRYNN, COM, REASON 1.5(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: THE NETHERLANDS' DEPARTING AMBASSADOR TO GHANA, HEIN PRINCEN, SPENT A FULL WEEK-END IN CLOSE QUARTERS WITH J. J. RAWLINGS, AND CAME AWAY BOTH FASCINATED AND A BIT UNNERVED. PRINCEN'S SPOUSE, A TRAINED SOCIAL WORKER, SAW INCONTROVERTIBLE EVIDENCE OF DRUG USE BY THE PRESIDENT. RAWLINGS COMPLAINED THAT HIS ADVISORS KEEP HIM IN THE DARK. HIS WIFE WAS PRESENT, AND RAWLINGS WAS DEFERENTIAL TOWARDS HER, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT THEY ARE SEEN TOGETHER ONLY FOR FAMILY REASONS OR REASONS OF STATE. PRINCEN FOUND RAWLINGS TIRED OF HIS PUBLIC PERSONA AND EASILY PERSUADED THAT PEOPLE WERE WORKING BEHIND HIS BACK. RAWLINGS SEEMS CAUGHT BETWEEN A DESIRE TO BRING HIS CHIEF OF STATE TENURE TO A CLOSE ON ONE HAND, AND A LIVELY FEAR OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF SO DOING ON THE OTHER. PRINCEN SAW RAWLINGS' NEWEST EMINENCE GRISE UP CLOSE, AND DID NOT LIKE HIS BALEFUL INFLUENCE IN THE AREA OF GHANAIAN ECONOMIC POLICY. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) THE SETTING: VERY OCCASIONALLY RAWLINGS INVITES AN ACCREDITED DIPLOMAT TO JOIN HIS FAMILY FOR WEEK-END RELAXATION AND CONVERSATION ON THE MODEST BUT COMFORTABLE PRESIDENTIAL YACHT ANCHORED IN VOLTA LAKE ONE HUNDRED MILES NORTHEAST OF ACCRA. (THE LAST HONOREE WAS AMERICAN AMBASSADOR KENNETH BROWN ON THE EVE OF HIS DEPARTURE IN MID-1995.) ALSO PRESENT WERE RAWLINGS' SIX CHILDREN, PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ANTHONY AIDOO (MORE LATER), AN UNNAMED GERMAN ENGINEER/BOAT CAPTAIN, AND A COUPLE OF MILITARY STAFFERS. GUESTS SO HONORED ARE ENJOINED NOT TO DISCUSS THE ADVENTURE INSIDE GHANA, AND PRINCEN ASSURED ME THAT I ALONE (IN GHANA) WAS PRIVY TO WHAT FOLLOWS.

¶3. (C) THE PRIVATE PERSONA: AMBASSADOR PRINCEN'S WIFE CONCLUDED EMPHATICALLY THAT RAWLINGS IS A DRUG-USER. PERIODS OF HIGH-LEVEL ENERGIZING WERE FOLLOWED BY RAWLINGS' DISAPPEARANCE FOR THIRTY MINUTES, AND UPON HIS RETURN HE WAS SUBDUED AND EVEN MELLOW. HE PERSPIRED PROFUSELY AT SHORT NOTICE, AND CONSUMED LARGE QUANTITIES OF NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS. PRINCEN REINFORCED MY OWN IMPRESSION THAT RAWLINGS' ATTENTION SPAN HAS SHORTENED OF LATE. BUT THE PRINCENS FOUND THE PRESIDENT OPEN, INDULGENT TOWARDS HIS CHILDREN, AND EXTREMELY DEFERENTIAL - EVEN OBSEQUIOUS - TOWARDS HIS SPOUSE. THE TENOR OF THEIR CONVERSATION REINFORCED THE WIDESPREAD IMPRESSION THAT THEY SEE EACH OTHER ONLY IN PUBLIC OR IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS RETREAT TO LAKE VOLTA. (RAWLINGS SAID THIS WAS THE FIRST FAMILY GATHERING THIS YEAR.) RAWLINGS WATCHED VIDEOS, LISTENED TO MUSIC, AND CHATTED UP HIS GUESTS SIMULTANEOUSLY. PRINCEN NOTICED WHAT ALL OF US OBSERVE AS INTERLOCUTORS: RAWLINGS' INCREDIBLE INABILITY TO RECALL NAMES, EVEN THOSE OF ADVISERS CONSTANTLY AT HIS ELBOW.

¶4. (C) RAWLINGS' CIRCLE OF ADVISORS: SINCE PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS LAST DECEMBER WE HAVE PUSHED THE THEME THAT PRESIDENT RAWLINGS SEEMS

TO HAVE BEEN STRIPPED OF A CIRCLE OF CONFIDANTS WHOSE COLLECTIVE WEIGHT, WHILE FAR FROM BRILLIANT, APPEARED TO MODERATE RAWLINGS' TENDENCY TO OVERACT AT FIRST EVIDENCE OF SOME UNPALATABLE DEVELOPMENT. WE ARE NOW WELL INTO A NEW PHASE, WHERE IT APPEARS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS FAR FROM WELL INFORMED AS TO WHAT TRANSPIRES IN HIS NAME. HE WAS MANIFESTLY OUT TO LUNCH ON THE PNG OF OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER IN MAY. WORLD BANK AND IMF VISITORS COMPLAIN THAT HE SEEMS PROFOUNDLY UNINFORMED ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, EVEN AS HIS MINISTER OF FINANCE IS SEEN BY FINANCIAL EXPERTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE GHANA AS ALARMINGLY INCOMPETENT. INTO THE VACUUM HAS MOVED ANTHONY AIDOO, WHOSE CONSPIRATORIAL DEMEANOR ENCOURAGES DARK SPECULATION ABOUT HIS MALIGN INFLUENCE ON RAWLINGS. AIDOO IS KNOWN TO US PRINCIPALLY FOR HIS ENTRENCHED LEFTIST LEANINGS, HIS ANTI-IMPERIALIST RHETORIC WHILE A PROFESSOR AT CAPE COAST UNIVERSITY, AND HIS AFFECTION FOR THE LIKES OF QADAFI AND CASTRO. AMBASSADOR PRINCEN'S OPPORTUNITY TO WATCH AIDOO AT CLOSE QUARTERS WAS FAR FROM REASSURING. AIDOO SEEMED TO REINFORCE RAWLINGS' FEARS THAT SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE CONSPIRING TO HIDE THINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT. AIDOO'S OBSEQUIOUS BEHAVIOR TOWARDS MRS. RAWLINGS ALSO REINFORCED THE IMPRESSION HERE IN ACCRA THAT SHE IS IN SOME DEGREE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ALIENATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S TRADITIONAL FRIENDS, WITH AIDOO NOW FILLING THE VOID.

15. (C) IMPACT ON ECONOMIC POLICY: ACCORDING TO PRINCEN THE ONLY SUSTAINED SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON GHANA'S CURRENT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. PRINCEN WAS INTRIGUED TO SEE RAWLINGS NODDING IN ASSENT AT AIDOO'S PRONOUNCEMENT THAT HIGH INFLATION WAS CAUSED BY IRRESPONSIBLE ELEMENTS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR SHOULD FIND A SOLUTION. AIDOO ALSO FED RAWLINGS THE NOTION THAT THE NORTH CAROLINA SUMMIT ON GHANA'S COMPETITIVENESS IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE WAS A CAMOUFLAGED ATTACK ON RAWLINGS' NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS. PRINCEN REMONSTRATED, BUT HE THOUGHT WITH LIMITED EFFECT. PRINCEN DID GAIN RAWLINGS' ATTENTION BY REGISTERING IMPRESSIONS CIRCULATING IN ACCRA THAT THE WORLD BANK AND IMF ARE INCREASINGLY DISSATISFIED WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF BOTH THE INCUMBENT MINISTER OF FINANCE PEPPRAH AND THE LARGER ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE POST-DECEMBER GOVERNMENT. RAWLINGS RESPONDED BY LASHING OUT AT MEMBERS OF HIS OWN GOVERNMENT - SOME WERE CITED BY NAME - WHO DELIBERATELY CONCEAL PROBLEMS FROM HIS ATTENTION. RAWLINGS BUILT UP A HEAD OF STEAM ON THE GHANA ELECTRICAL COMMISSION'S ANNOUNCEMENT TWO WEEKS AGO THAT RATES WOULD RISE UP TO 300, RETROACTIVE TO MAY 1; THIS WAS DESIGNED TO DESTABILIZE HIS GOVERNMENT, HE THOUGHT. THE LARGER IMPRESSION, HOWEVER, WAS THAT PRESIDENT RAWLINGS WAS NOT WELL INFORMED OF RECENT UNSETTLING ECONOMIC TRENDS.

16. (C) COMMENT: THE IMPRESSIONS REGISTERED ABOVE ARE THOSE OF A VETERAN CAREER DIPLOMAT (PREVIOUSLY AMBASSADOR IN PERU AND NOW OFF TO SRI LANKA) WHOSE CONFIDENTIAL OBSERVATIONS ON OTHER OCCASIONS HAVE HELD UP WELL. PRINCEN'S OBSERVATIONS ECHO IMPRESSIONS I RECORDED EARLIER THIS YEAR (REFTEL). IF THEY HOLD WATER, WE MUST SEE IN THEM A GIANT STEP BACKWARDS IF CLOSE CONFIDANTS LIKE ANTHONY AIDOO ARE PREJUDICING THE PRESIDENT AGAINST THE TRADE AND INVESTMENT INITIATIVE LAUNCHED AT CHAPEL HILL IN EARLY JUNE. AND, IN A LARGER ARENA, IF AS A RESULT OF FATIGUE OR ISOLATION OR UNHEALTHY PERSONAL PRACTICES PRESIDENT RAWLINGS FAILS TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP SKILLS DURING HIS SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL TERM, THERE MIGHT BE DELETERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS FOR ALL THAT TOUCHES ON THE ECONOMY: THE GROWTH OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS; THE CONTINUATION OF AN ERA OF DOMESTIC PEACE; THE EMERGENCE OF A PRIVATE SECTOR ABLE TO INVITE SIGNIFICANT OUTSIDE INVESTMENT AND PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. AMBASSADOR PRINCEN NOTED THAT RAWLINGS PLANS TO MARK MY OWN DEPARTURE WITH A SIMILAR WEEK-END ADVENTURE. BUT AS IT NOW STANDS THAT MAY NOT COME SOON, LEAVING MUCH TIME FOR ANTHONY AIDOO TO BREW A POISONOUS POTION IN THE CASTLE.

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